RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN

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RHUS INTEGRIFOLIA

LEMONADE BERRY

Prepared

by

RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN

of the

NATIVE PLANTS OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Ana Canyon
Orange County
California

No. 32

RHUS INTEGRIFOLIA
LEMONADE BERRY

May 24, 1940

Anacardiaceae — Sumac Family

A medium to large evergreen shrub or small tree to 25 ft. Bark on old trunks dark and rough, on young branches gray to reddish. Leaves alternate, leathery, dull green, the blades 1 to 2½ in. long, somewhat undulate, with margins serrate or entire, on petioles about ¼ in. long. Inflorescence a terminal panicle bearing 25 to 40 fls., each subtended by 3 small, ovate, hairy, greenish bracts. Flowers small, about ¼ in. across, composed of 5 ciliolate, very pale green, ovate sepals; 5 ciliolate, white to pinkish, spreading, obovate petals; glandular disc at base of calyx somewhat fleshy; stamens 5, the anthers 2-celled; ovary 1-celled, bearing 3 short styles, but producing only 1 ovule, from which develops a flattened, rounded, berry-like drupe 3/8 in. long, covered with thin flesh, the surface of which is glandular and hairy, becoming reddish at maturity, but often whitened by the glandular secretions. Seed with a tough, membranous coat. In seedlings the cotyledons appear above the ground, are oval, entire, about ¾ in. long; the next few leaves are toothed.

The genus Rhus (the name derived from the Greek word Rhous for some ancient species of sumac) consists of about 150 species found on all continents in temperate and subtropical regions. Six kinds are found in California, of which three are of value as ornamentals for dry land plantings.

Rhus integrifolia (the species name in reference to the entire leaves sometimes found) was discovered by Thos. Nuttall, famous American botanist, at Santa Barbara and San Diego, who described it in 1838 under the generic name Styphonia (a genus now usually consolidated with Rhus). Nuttall also collected specimens in the same areas on which the leaves were toothed and proposed the name Styphonia serrata, but it is now known that this plant varies greatly in its leaf characters, even on the same plant, so that the scope of the name integrifolia is generally enlarged to include serrata. In 1878, Bentham and Hooker, English botanists, transferred Styphonia integrifolia to the genus Rhus, a treatment which has been generally accepted since.

The Lemonade Berry, as Rhus integrifolia is commonly known, gets its English name because the fruits are covered with a

highly acid pulp which can be used to flavor drinks. It is a characteristic shrub of the cismontane areas of Southern California from Santa Barbara County to northern Baja California. Along coastal bluffs it frequently forms great solid patches trimmed to a uniform height by the ocean breezes. Further inland the plants are taller and are one of the most common large shrubs of the lower foothills in association with the Wild Buckwheat, Sages and other soft-chaparral species. It grows in a variety of soils but is largely confined to those of secondary origin such as shales, sandstones and alluvial deposits. In its native stands it is deep rooted and ideally fitted to go through the long dry season. From February to March the plants are attractive for their flowers. Throughout the rest of the year they provide welcome patches of green on hillsides which are mainly brown.

For many years the Lemonade Berry has been a highly valued shrub for planting on dry banks and hillsides. The plants thrive in nearly any soil or habitat in Southern California, but are best near the coast (areas not over 30 miles inland). For inland plantings the Sugar Bush (Rhus ovata) should be substituted. The Lemonade Berry should be set out during the winter season in order to become established so that little water will have to be given them during the hot summer months. After the first season the plants will ordinarily be able to do without irrigation. Growth habit may be controlled by early pruning or pinching off of young shoots, while older plants may be made to produce new growth by cutting branches nearly to the ground.

Plants of Rhus integrifolia are readily obtainable from nurserymen who generally sell them in gallon cans. If desired the plants can be easily propagated from seed. Seeds are easily gathered in April or May and should be rubbed to remove the outer fruit coat. Early fall planting is best and may be in outside seed beds or in boxes. Just before planting the seeds should be soaked over night in water which has been heated to about 180 degrees F. In from two to four months the seedlings will be large enough to transplant to pots or other containers. The use of small tar paper containers will result in the growth of plants with good root systems. These small plants will often be large enough to set out the first spring and will generally make better mature plants than if held over in the nursery until the following season, but they will require more care during the first summer.

RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN

Of The Native Plants of California.

Established 1927

In Memory of John W. Bixby

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Purpose: A scientific institution devoted to the growth and study of the native plants of California for their botanical, horticultural and popular features.

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